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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the process and content of The Columbus Project, designed to provide an opportunity for preservice teachers to explore in depth the complexity of intercultural encounter. The project required students to gather and analyze data from schools, libraries, the media, and interviews with children, to ascertain how the story of the initial arrival of Europeans in the Americas has traditionally been and is presently being represented. The aim was to help students perceive the narrow ethnocentrism of traditional teaching and to help themselves and each other begin to rethink American history. In conjunction with studies of Jean Piaget, students learned by direct experience what the term "cognitive dissonance" meant in their own lives. Classroom activities for the project involved students "freewriting" on everything they knew about Columbus, viewing the video "Columbus Didn't Discover Us," discovering alternative perspectives, learning facts about the history of Native Americans, and designing lesson plans. Students' development of consciousness and implications for teachers and teacher educators are discussed. (Contains 20 references.) (JDD)

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ED 374 103

# PIAGET AND COLUMBUS:

# A POST-HOLE DIG INTO DECENTERING

## (a qualitative study in progress)

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PIAGET AND COLUMBUS:

A POST-HOLE DIG INTO DECENTERING

I have seen what we discussed in class first hand, and I see the need for change.[1]

## Overview

For two consecutive fall semesters since 1992, I have been observing and recording the responses of my teacher education students as they worked on a long-range assignment, The Columbus Project (See Appendix). I designed the project to provide an opportunity for pre-teachers to explore in depth the complexity of intercultural encounter, as an intensive way in--a "post hole dig"--to our own history. This paper represents a description of the process and content of that project. By focusing on student voices, it seeks to determine both the need for it, and its effectiveness.

The project requires university students to gather and analyze data from schools, libraries, the media, and interviews with children, to ascertain how the story of the initial arrival of Europeans in the Americas has traditionally been and is presently being represented. My short-range aim is to provide sustained cognitive dissonance through which students must reflect upon this particular content, for two reasons: 1), to help them perceive the narrow ethnocentrism of traditional teaching, and 2) to help themselves and each other begin to rethink American History. Ultimately, my aim is to both model for them and empower them to make bold, honest and deeply reflective decisions about how they

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[1]. from student writing at the end of Elementary Education class, fall, 1992)

will want to teach.

More important than an alternative perspective on how to teach traditional and often unquestioned Social Studies content, I conceived of The Columbus Project as an opportunity for teacher education students to come to terms with their own and our society's ethno-egocentrism. The directions for crafting a final individual product indicate:

> Reflecting on all that you have gathered, try to see the Columbus story and its aftermath from the perspective of the people who were here when Columbus arrived. Conclude to what extent the materials represent that perspective.

In the advanced classes, the project accompanied their study of Piaget, and became linked to it. Within the activities of the project, students learned by direct experience what the term "cognitive dissonance" meant in their own lives. Student voices throughout the semesters under study conveyed severe disequilibrium as they struggleed to assimilate the new information. At very least, they found the new perspective profoundly disturbing:

> The (new information and feelings) makes me uncomfortable. I was taught the discovery and colonialism was (sic.) a good thing. Until this class I knew no less.

## The research questions

I have been interested in the extent to which teacher education students' almost universally Euro-centric pre-project knowledge base undergoes changes as they gather, sift through, reflect about and share materials that require them to address the Native American perspective on Columbus's arrival in "The New World." A series of continuing questions has emerged from almost

two years of data gathering from student products:

1) What individual readings, videos, experiences or dialogues seem fundamentally to unhinge students'prior attitudes? Does a certain sequence or combination of such experiences seem most effective in bringing about serious questioning of prior unexamined received wisdom?

2) What is involved in student reluctance to consider the new information? How might a professor support students as they gradually come to terms with the fundamental contradictions between what they had been taught and what they are now confronting? In particular, why is it so difficult to move some students away from the man, Christopher Columbus, and their pained need to decide whether he is hero or villain?

3) What can students learn about their own early schooling, in both process and content, from their investigation of this subject matter? What impact does that new perspective on their own schooling have on their decisions for their own future teaching?

4) What courage and support will it take for them to carry this new set of perspectives into their student teaching and subsequent teaching, out in "the real world," where most other teachers are either avoiding the topic entirely or still presenting exclusively Euro-centric lessons?

## The theoretical framework

This has been essentially a Teacher Education student research project, or at least a collaborative research project. Rich annotated bibliographies have emerged from investigations of print and video materials available in a wide range of magazines, newpapers, church bulletins, TV specials, etc., especially in 1992, the year of the quincentennial, but generally from more permanent collections in elementary school and town libraries, and in classroom texts, materials,[2] activities, language, and bulletin

[2] including a horrifying array of very recent but still completely traditional commercial dittos, upon which a shocking number of teachers seem to rely

boards. University students were shocked to find so little that they could recommend as honest perspectives on the Columbus story or complex, non-stereotyped portrayals of Native American People (see Appendix).[3]

For use in my university classroom, I introduced certain materials, mostly those presenting a non-Eurocentric perspective, though I also used for analysis photocopies of illustrations from a children's book representing Indian people in classic stereotypical ways. The video documentary Columbus Didn't Discover Us (Leppzer, 1992) is a pivotal sources of discussion, as are the first chapter of A People's History of the United States (Zinn, 1980) and the entire magazines, Rethinking Columbus (Rethinking Schools, 1992) and Original Americans: US Indians (Minority Rights Group, 19 [now, unfortunately, out of print]).

In terms of scholarly literature on the kind of work this study attempted, an extensive early 1994 ERIC search of some five hundred abstracts called up by an exhaustive series of descrip-tors and combinations of descriptors from 1980 to the present found not one replication of this kind of project. Only one title mentioned Columbus. That turned out to be an historian's review of the controversies and summary of perspectives (Thernstron, 1992), which may turn out to be another useful resource for faculty.

In terms of multicultural and/or attitude-broadening programs described in ther ERIC search, most were designed for elementary,

[3] A graduate assistant is in the process of organizing the second year's set of recommended resources. That list should be available by the end of the spring, 1994 semester.

middle and secondary students. Not that these could not be effectively adapted to university classrooms; indeed, I have already begun to incorporate some of the ideas into my own teaching. I also found articles describing university courses designed to develop more informed and empathic student attitudes about cultures other than their own. Many of these studied programs of direct involvement in schools and community. Others, more connected to my own study, were concerned with ways to achieve de-centering through cognitive dissonance (Beal, J.L. et. al, 1982; Dana, N.F., 1991; Dufrene, P., 1991; Finch, M.E, & Rasch, K. 1992; Fuller, M.L. & Ahler, J.G., 1987; Klug, B.J. et. al, 1992; Watt, M.G., 1987; Wisemann, R.A. & Portis, S.C., 1986). None of these, however, seemed interested in combining all the venues, strategies and goals of the project under study here.

## Methodology

Pre- and post-intervention freewrites provide the framework within which the short-term effectiveness of the project has been evaluated: what do students say at the end of the semester about what they have learned from The Columbus Project, and what directions do they hope to take as a result of it?

Through on-going dialogic feedback inn response to their freewrites and reader response papers, my own pedagogical style allowed me access to student thinking and feeling on this topic. [4] I would write in their margins, and they would write back to me,

[4] See guidelines for Reader Response papers, Appendix.

through at least two rounds of dialogue. Some representative samples suggest the possibilities for extended critical rethinking inherent in this method. (The language in brackets is mine; that outside the brackets is the student's.):

> 1) (re: the video)...they (the indigenous people) don't want everything back or everything changed just enough to end the suffering. "There is plenty to go around."
>
> [Are we programmed not to believe it?]
>
> I think so. As Americans I think the general feeling is there is never enough--food, $, happiness, security.
>
> 2) The Pequot massacre was disturbing to me. You kind of expected this from the colonists but by other tribes...
>
> **[wait--had you always known this?]**
>
> **No. I think just lately I am reacting this way.** I used to think the Indians deserved it or instigated the fighting.

As fine an example of emergent criticial thinking this and many other student writings may be, there as a caution. As with any of our attempts to interrupt their tendency to teach exactly as they were taught, the real test of their learning is not their rhetoric but the extent to which students do or do not get absorbed into the traditional culture once they're in the schools, away from the university influence. The Columbus issue will be a barometer, as I follow students' thinking and planning into their own classrooms, over time. Question four above expands the range of data gathering beyond the freewrites, reader response papers, written dialogues, group presentations, final products and final exam that The Columbus Project in my classrooms involves. It is in

this sphere that the research will continue to be in progress for at least another year, as numbers of students who experienced the project are in the field, designing and implementing their own lessons, deciding how they are going to treat Columbus Day with their own students.

## Activities

The Columbus Project was a long-range assignment for my undergraduate and graduate certification classes. Certain in-class and follow-up activities varied somewhat between the two classes, and from the first fall semester to the second, but the basic project was the same. Assessment of its impact appeared in students' self-evaluations, as well as in their final individual products. To see what students retained as most compelling, I included "What I learned from my Columbus project" as one of the essays in the exam for the introductory undergraduate teacher education class in 1992.

Opening activities. As a pre-investigation assessment in early September, I had students freewrite briefly on everything they knew about Columbus. Many recalled the rhyme, "In fourteen hundred and ninety two/Columbus sailed the ocean blue." Almost everyone used the word "discovered." Most listed the names of the ships. Some talked about adventure, funding by the royalty of Spain, his search for spices (one said pepper was the purpose of the voyages). On the other hand, I would estimate that at most one fifth of the students mentioned the presence of the Indian People.

While they were writing, I casually picked up someone's

backpack from the floor beside her desk, and began intently and dramatically to take things out of it, keeping some with glee and throwing other things aside. (I got this piece of theater from Bill Bigelow's article in Rethinking Columbus.) One or two students, busy writing, did not notice, but everyone else watched me. But no one spoke.

Finally, in the advanced class but not in the introductory class, one person (not the owner of the backpack) challenged me. My justification in response was, "I discovered it, so it's mine!" Immediately, then, they freewrote about their feelings, before we began a full-class discussion of what they had felt and what it might have meant in terms of the Columbus story. Most reported feeling that privacy had been invaded, violated, and some that they were angry and upset. However, most also said they had felt powerless to stop me or even speak. The student who had dared to speak in that one of four classes helped all of us understand the reason for everyone else's silence. What courage it had taken for her to speak--and what that tells us about power! She later wrote,

> I felt that because you were the authority figure and you believed that what you were doing was ok, then anything I said to contradict that wouldn't matter. You would have come back with some kind of justifi- cations. My feelings would not have been heard. After all if someone can ravage (sic.) through someone else's stuff without caring, how can I expect to be heard by that person?

That theater piece has been equally effective everywhere my colleagues and I have tried it. After the shock, the post-drama processing is where the connection to Columbus gets made. Only a few students in their pre-conversation freewrite made the leap

beyond their own personal outrage at my bold and terrible act to the historical meaning. One of those who did get it right away was one who had already been aware enough to include Native Americans in her list of what she knew about Columbus; she had previously heard a very moving lecture by an Indian woman. About the backpack grab she wrote:

> That was sooooo effective! That really puts things into perspective. I totally can see the Native's point of view and the feelings of invasion!! Not through all the new news discoveries about the truth of the discovery of America did I understand what I do with just that quick demonstration.

From the voices of Indian People. The next week of each fall semester, both classes watched the new video documentary, Columbus Didn't Discover Us (Leppzer, 1992), and expressed a range of reactions: shock; sadness and shame at the injustice; confusion; outrage at having never been taught American history from this point of view; deeper understanding and knowledge; inspiration by Native People's spirit; frustration and powerlessness in the face of a seemingly overwhelming situation; guilt; threatened, afraid they will have to give up something; and angry defensiveness. This range provided a rich diversity of perspectives for writing and discussion.

Several students freewrote, "This film really opened my eyes," and "I never realized...." Several others wrote of identifying or knowing "how the other side felt." Calling forth that empathy in particular had been my purpose in showing the video, though I understood that operating on the level of feelings is a risky venture for a classroom. However, the empathy was not univeral.

Indeed, I was unprepared for the level of need to protect a cherished myth. In resisting the present tense of the video, some students insisted on the inevitability of privilege and progress, even destiny. As the student voice from pages 21-22 suggests, those students were in a developmental phase of guilt and anger. More than one concluded, essentially, "What happened, happened and now all people must get past it." Another wrote,

> I don't view what the indiginous (sic.) people view. I foresee (sic.) these problems not as societal problems, but as individual problems.

Some struggled to put it together, universalizing European behavior:

> I don't think it is fair to blame Columbus for problems that exist 500 years later. Some white person or any other color person would have come upon this land. I don't see how in a developing world this could have been avoided. Whoever came, there would have been problems with cultural clashes. Problems exist even today among many ethnic groups. Sadly, human nature seems to be like this in our world today and probably years ago.

Belief in the destiny of this "encounter," and "our" preeminent position that resulted from it, students realized, comes from their early schooling in the traditional story of "discovery." Like ourselves, most of them, as children, had learned at least the attitude behind this song that I myself heard during the fall, 1992 semester in a third grade classroom:

> I'm just a little boy
> Look at me
> I want to be a sailor and go to sea.
> Don't you try and stop me
> 'Cause you see
> Someday I'll find a new world
> It's my destiny

Severe dissonance: One right answer? or multiple realities? Given such homogeneous incoming prior knowledges and feelings, it is not surprising that post-video class conversation should have been lively! However, the open discussion in the fall, 1992 advanced class got skewed when several students, feeling personally attacked by the Indian People's indictment of "the white man," attacked back. They insisted that Columbus the man was being unfairly accused.

One, seeming to speak as well for less vocal others, demanded facts, then rejected them when they didn't fit her preconceptions. It was very hard to move the discussion off of Columbus the man, hard to get them to focus on what was really being said and shown in the film and in subsequent readings, and hard to overcome a few students' repeated and strongly asserted conviction that I was "pushing" my opinion by asking them to look seriously at another historical reality. These few dominanted the discussion for a while, demanding "the other side," unwilling to accept my saying that they had grown up with the other side.

The wide range, and especially the ambivalence of feeling, became suddenly polarized; students who were simultaneously experiencing many confusing and even contradictory feelings were temporarily drawn to take sides.

That was a difficult situation to negotiate! Ultimately, the work itself--the readings, outside project work, writings, sharing, and writebacks--and time--re-established the full complexity of the topic. After much reflection, I decided that my work in direct

intervention with the class and with individual students would be first to have them recognize their own dichotomous thinking. Requiring themselves to decide--needing one right answer--about whether he was a hero or a villain was blocking some students from seeing that the traditional Columbus story must also be told from another point of view. Both are true for the people who experienced them. The underlying concept I had to teach was about multiple realities.

Student resistance to "blaming" Columbus took one particularly interesting but disturbing direction, especially disturbing because I was repeatedly also reading and hearing it from otherwise well-respected writers and colleagues during the fall, 1992 awareness of the quincentennial. The argument is that Columbus's can not be judged by "today's standards," that his behavior was perfectly "acceptable" for "those days." Responses to this argument would be easily available from information about dissent in and immediately after "those days," in particular the widely publicized writings of de las Casas (Uribe, 1992; Zinn, 1980), if colleagues otherwise fastidious about what they know would see this as an issue to investigate.

The ignoring of the full historical picture by otherwise intelligent and thoughtful people in their need to defend Columbus--and of course the European domination of this hemisphere, of which his claim to it was the first step--takes this notion beyond hearing it as a mere academic argument. The assumptions that underlie it, and its widespread acceptance, suggest how hard, and

how important, our efforts to move students off of early socialization and egocentrism continues to be.

Stretching beyond preconceptions. I am gratified to say that most of the students in my classes were sincerely troubled by the new information and the feelings they called forth, but did not retreat into such defensiveness. They were willing to problematize the historical package, and to use materials I provided as an opportunity to discover alternative facts and the perspective that accompanies them. They accepted the need, as people about to be teachers, to explore and deal with the contradictions between what they had always been taught and what might also be true. Some of them saw that they were engaged in a struggle to face what those very contradictions might mean about all of the history they had studied. Many went through a phase of anger at having been betrayed and lied to by all their earlier schooling.

Whatever side they came out on, or however they balanced the contradictions for themselves, students seem to have decided that, no matter how unsettling these new perspectives are and no matter how much they might wish to go back to the "happily ever after" view of the Europeans and the Native Americans, they can no longer be comfortable thinking of going out and teaching Columbus only in the traditional way. That most took the issue this seriously is represented by one 1993 student's dialogue with me, sustained for weeks after watching the video:

> Such hostility. I don't blame many of them. They are correct about the Ecology issue; someone has to worry about the environment, as no one else is. The sense of

unfairness that is never revealed in any history books. I know they are trying to foster unity from their oppression, but they perpetuate so much bitterness.

[You're hearing their frustration, anger, poverty, pain and determination as hostility and bitterness. How come?]

I believe it is due to the media and other sources not showing the Native Americans' side of the story. Many sources have shown the poverty, alcoholism and lack of respect for American (US) culture, but presented in such a way that puts the blame on the Native Americans for not adapting to our culture.

History books only tell the side they think is important. As we said in class, how can we teach children that this entire country is based on genocide? I believe they should learn eventually, but it is a terrible thing we did (and in some cases are still doing) to Native Americans. Most History books do not want the US to seem like Bad guys.

Teaching facts. The next intervention was to jigsaw (Aronson, 1978) a comprehensive and well-researched publication on the history of Indian people after Columbus, published by a British group, Minority Affairs Report. Students in groups of four had to read a two-page section of The Original Americans: The US Indians, come to agreement about what the important points were, and prepare to "teach" their section to the other groups. Groupings were then re-formed so that they were composed of one person from each of the first stage groups. Each was an expert on her/his section, and the others listened and took notes. At the end, a freewriting declaring what they now knew about Native American people suggested that students learned the most from the intensive reading of their own section, but that they had also learned by listening to others.

Reflection on that exercise highlighted certain flaws. In the

direct instruction format, the making of connections between sections got lost in the rush to just get the information imparted. On the other hand, maybe what happened was all that was possible, for that early in the semester. It could also have been that the reading may have seemed just too hard, even though each student had only a small portion.

Factors unrelated to the topic of the reading, even its emotional context, may not have been the only ones operating. I could see from this activity that students were not used to deciding for themselves what is important in a reading, to making group decisions, or to relying on each other for information. I have to keep reminding myself that, schooled almost exclu- sively in traditionally-structured classrooms, they were also not accustomed to making or at least to trusting their own connections between ideas, or to making their own meaning from an array of facts. In the 1992 semester, therefore, this assignment did not seem to have the impact I had expected and intended for it to have, for most students. In their final papers, most hardly referred to it when they spoke of their changed consciousness about American history and Native American people.

With all of that in mind, in the next fall's graduate class I used The Original Americans again. This time, however, I gave small collaborative groups time in class together, after reading their excerpt individually, to consult, understand, and then decide which concepts they wanted to teach the rest of the class. Instead of one week, I gave them almost two months for the whole process. The

importance of the content was validated by the time spent. The outcome of their group work was to create full-fledged half hour lesson plans that would engage the rest of the class in direct experiences through which we would come to acquire whatever concepts the group decided were most salient from their jigsaw section.

By setting limitations that excluded either lecture or direct instruction, groups were compelled to design hands-on interactive lessons--often role plays--that did their best to take all seven intelligences into account. The difference in impact from the first experiment with this article was not only reported in information and concepts acquired, but was deeply felt within the class as, increasingly from week to week, the lessons effectively took us into Native American consciousness!

Preconceptions persist. Because of its difficulty, nevertheless, I had decided not to use that reading with the introductory classes. There, in the 1992 class, almost two months after the backpack drama and the video, Columbus Didn't Discover Us, which it introduced, students were supposedly well into independent Columbus Project work. As it turns out, that very independence, expectation of autonomy, and absence of in-class follow-up and opportunity for sharing may have been the reason why preconceptions were allowed to persist.

To check in on perspectives, assuming students were doing all

this research outside of class, I handed out crayons and invited students, "draw a Native American." Before we shared the drawings, I asked them to freewrite about what they had drawn, and why they had made the choices they made. Exactly half of the drawings depended on stereotypical images: feathers, headbands, one tomahawk and full headdress (on a woman!). One was seated "Indian-style," and one elaborate drawing portrayed a man naked except for some kind of shorts-type clothing, with a bow and arrow.

The justifications for these, over and over, indicted the images they had seen in books and on film as children. As had been revealed both Septembers with the "facts" about Columbus, such stereotypes were at the forefront--or the entire substance--of their memories, and therefore of their knowledge. But they also indicated that these are the images they continue to see on TV and in books, and especially on schoolchildren's worksheets. Clearly, these are the images still being put forward, in the 500th year:

> I chose to draw an Indian girl (in full regalia, with one feather) because yesterday at Kindergarten the kids drew Indians and this is kind of what they looked like.

Consciousness about whether this is still what Indian People look and particularly dress like, even if they ever did, was tested by my having put up on the blackboard a series of posters of Native Americans in the 20th century, including Will Rogers, Buffy St. Marie, Maria Tallchief, a golf pro, an Olympic runner, and other famous people not usually acknowledged (by European-Americans) to be Native American. Those pictures were up there while the students drew! While one wrote in past tense--this is what they

looked like--another justified her feather and headband in present tense.

Another complication that I had not anticipated, but which is important to address, is that some European-Americans really think that they themselves are "natives" of America, or that the Pilgrims or original settlers were. The Native Americans are one people and the Indians are another. Had I been doing conscious Piaget work at the time, I would have analyzed, with them, the preconceptions under the "errors." As it was, I did not find out how many of the half that drew their Native Americans without stereotypical "Indian" gestures or symbols were thinking of themselves as "native" and just drew "an American." Others of that half were quite clear that Native Americans are also known as Indian people: "they look and dress and live just like us. Maybe their skin is darker, and maybe their hair is longer, that's all."

The main conclusion that most students--and I--drew from that exercise was expressed by two young women:

> I think that the problem was that I didn't think. It's so deep in us that this is what they look like that I automatically drew it....
>
> It think it's kind of sad that what we were taught at such a young age always stays with us, even though there were pictures right in front of us to prove otherwise.

When the 1992 introductory class visited the Institute for American Indian Studies (Washington, CT) together during class time the next week, students were more prepared for what they would see and hear than they would have been if we had not done the "Draw a Native American" exercise. As it was, I have the feeling they were

overwhelmed by the distance to get there; the honesty, complexity, beauty, and spirituality of the atmosphere; and the gentle eloquent militancy of the Educational Director. I hope they will return, on their own. There was too much to see and experience in such a short time. Nevertheless, many of them got her primary messages: we are here, we have not disappeared, we are connected to the earth and our history and each other, and there are many ways of being human.

## Student findings

The full weight of the Columbus Project work, by their own report, was effective for all but a few of my students in both semesters. The most frequently repeated phrases in the completed papers were "I never realized," or "I realized how little I knew." Their investigations into what is being said, done and seen in classrooms frightened them. Once they began to know the more complex story for themselves, they were aware of the narrowness of the focus they had never previously questioned.

The early and recurrent question--"So what are we supposed to teach?"--was one they found teachers in the schools they visited answering in various ways. Several found that teachers appeared to have been told by administrators to avoid the controversy by avoiding the subject of Columbus Day entirely. Otherwise, students mostly found, to their astonishment, more of the same of what they recognized from their own schooling, even including the objectification of "'i' is for Indian" that they now had been cautioned to avoid, for reasons most now understood.

So what do you teach the children? What do you avoid? What do you criticize of what children come to school with? Probably the most widespread view among practicing teachers is that it can't hurt to tell children the old story at the early ages. To examine this attitude among my students, I read aloud some revised versions of familiar fairy tales, and asked students in both undergraduate classes. Surprisingly many of them resisted the retelling, some to the extent of anger, as if something precious to them had been violated. So it may not just be patriotism that makes them cling to Columbus the hero, but protection of all myths.

The quality of the completed products varied. Almost everyone found some article or resource I had not yet seen, so I have now acquired photocopies of an enormous range of relevant materials, from first grade worksheets to op ed pieces to Sunday church bulletins to the newsletter of the Knights of Columbus. The depth of close, critical reading of those materials they gathered varied according the the ability or willingness of students to do thoughtful in-depth analysis. Some students interviewed children, and some even got them to talk on tape; some got children to draw, and some got peers to draw. Some talked to teachers, some to family. One got into an argument with her boss at a restaurant, and soon several customers got involved! Many watched TV specials.

Looking at children's literature or text books, students almost unanimously found two things: 2) there are a few excellent

mostly brand new books out there, but 2) very few of them are in school classrooms or town libraries. Our own university Curriculum Lab is no better than most school or town libraries, and not as good as some. All of its materials tell the story the completely Eurocentric way. However, to the surprise of many, including me, our town library has many of the more consciously inclusive material. From this frustrating bibliographic process, students learned that to find alternative sources, teachers have to search, and to do that they have to have an idea of what they are looking for. Now, from this work, I have reason to believe they might. In their products, or in their final self-evaluation papers, many students spoke of the transforming power of the experience of doing this research. Many indicated they had gone though significant changes.

The development of consciousness

Not everyone came through the semester transformed, however. some, the whole thing was another academic exercise, something to get through in order to get a grade. But one very quiet student, for whom the semester had been extremely troubling, reported the full range of her feelings in a way that may summarize and interpret what most students experienced to some extent:

> My first feelings (after the jigsawing of "The Original Americans: The US Indians")...were of disgust and anger toward the white man who took it upon himself to literally ravage the life, land, and property of these people. I could not believe the reality of this cruelty. The white man did not even respect these people as fellow human beings.
>
> I found myself next with a feeling of guilt knowing what really had happened. I felt like it was much easier

to hold on to old notions of the situation. Notions that told me that the Native Americans lived a happy and peaceful life, coexisting with the white man.

But, through knowing the truth, I have come to understand that these notions, which my own schooling had taught me, were just more injustices done in the face of the Native Americans. These notions, I realized, did not take into account the perspective of the Native American. They were strictly from the point of view of the white man.

Through my realization of this, my feelings then turned to disgrace for who I was. I was very uncomfortable with these feelings, and I began to internally try to defend my position as a white person who was not directly involved with this oppression. I felt like I was being blamed for something I did not do.

I finally came to peace with these feelings when I realized that they were only natural, considering that this perspective that I was being presented with was very different from anything I had been presented with before. I needed time to digest it all....

...In reading children's books, in visiting some schools, in reading a few articles in the newspaper, in reflection of my own elementary school years, and in interviewing my nephews and nieces, I realized just how much the dominant white culture influences how the Columbus issue is portrayed.

Now that I have been told this truth, I feel empowered to begin the process of giving the people the right information about what happened five hundred years ago and what continues to happen today. With this as one of my goals, I feel I will be doing a great justice to a group of people who have seen the face of injustice for too many years.

Implications for teachers and teacher educators

So what do we teach the children? Do we "give them the facts on both sides, and let them choose"? Is it possible that "choice" in such a situation would be real, given the weight of availability of "the facts" on the European "side"? Do we tell "the truth" at all? How much of "the truth"? And how? At what age do we teach

about the atrocities? Clearly our own teachers thought that no age was appropriate for us to know about them. So where do we start? What's developmentally appropriate? What can children handle? What do they see on TV? What are we shielding them from here, and why? It seems to me that the argument about what to teach the children really has in it the fear expressed overtly by one student, but probably felt by many:

> "Will we be considered unAmerican if we tell the story from the Native American point of view?"

The learning, essentially, was about their having been brought up to believe that Columbus was a hero, and how little they knew and were taught in all of their own schooling. They realized that students are still being taught the same thing today, and that what teachers are doing is keeping the stereotypes alive. Almost as many insisted, "Children can understand, if given a chance. We underestimate their interest, their concern, and their capacity.

As some of my students realized, not only the full content is missing from the usual study of US History; the pedagogy itself is at least as much of the problem:

> There seems to be a lack of connections between events, people and places. Everything is taught in separate units, and the kids never see how it all relates. This is how I was taught history, and I'll be the first to admit that my understanding of history is minimal.

Students were about evenly divided in saying one of three things, all related and all very sobering:

I never knew Indians were there
I knew but never realized or thought about it
I never gave it much though because I was always taught Indians were bad
Even though I have always watched this show, I never really saw it

They are also evenly divided on what they see in schools:

Teachers are avoiding the subject
Teacher are still teaching what I was taught
(but almost no representat on of the multiple truths)

They report that the work we did made them aware:

of what Indians went through
of what Indians still go through
of how effective early teaching is
of how we as a culture look at difference
of the importance of looking at two sides of a story
of what needs to be done

## Conclusion

The persistence of a skewed perspective on the first event in US history, as it is taught in our elementary classrooms, seems to me to be reason enough to argue for the inclusion of such a project as a part of a Teacher Education program. As my students repeatedly suggested, if they had not experienced the project, they would never have thought about the Native American perspective, never have questioned the traditional teaching of the Columbus story or any other event in US history, and would certainly have taught it the way they themselves were taught it.

Although it seems to me that the greatest change took place within the fall, 1993 advanced graduate class in terms of really getting inside the perspective of Native American People, it seems to me from their final reflections that individuals in each of the

four classes working on the Columbus Project came out changed at least to some extent. The 1993 graduate class had the advantage of general maturity, the simultaneous study of Piaget, the transformed and integrated design of the Original Americans jigsaw, including many powerful role plays. The constants over all four classes included: sustained time on the issue: the variety, depth, and immediacy of materials and exercises; the powerful readings; the contradictory school observations and library research; the small group work of conversations, plan-ning, and implementation of lessons; the role plays; and the freewrites and writebacks.

As in any teaching for deep transformation of perspective, no one of those interventions, by itself, can account for the effectiveness of the project. Though the real reckoning will come as I survey teachers in the field who were participants in these classes, the results over the short term show time and energy well spent.

I predict that the students from the fall of 1993, especially the graduate students, will be more confident of their knowledge about this topic, and of their obligation and ability to present it to their own students in greater complexity, than they would have been without our work on the Columbus Project. I also predict that all four classes that experienced the project will be more aware, more knowledgeable, and more resistant to falling back into what has always been taught than will the most graduates of our certification program, including students of the spring semesters

of my own courses. Determining whether that is true will be the focus of the next step of this research.

There is hope for a positive outcome. Eight out of twenty-four students in the 1992 introductory class reported feeling the obligation to do something. Almost all in the 1993 graduate class reported that feeling. While many in all classes said, "teachers should...," perhaps one quarter to one half, over the two semesters, spoke of feeling the power to make a difference. The free-written words of two in particular give me support to continue the struggle to infuse all of my teaching with the opportunity to explore the reality that every event has more than one perspective:

> 1) I learned to look at what our educatational system is, and not be afraid to question and change it. As teachers we can go along with the program or actively seek to improve and change it. It taught me that learning to seek and accept the truth is a vital first step in trusting ourselves and others. Egocentrism must be replaced by comunity-centrism...As teachers we have the power to change this, but will we? I know I will.
>
> 2) One teacher can change 30 attitudes..., and if there's 20 of us yearly changing 30 young minds, then sooner or later the attitudes are going to start to change, and at some point, because we are each taking our step, the myth may be dispelled.

## The Columbus Project

Because 1992 was celebrated and problematized in the US as the quincentennial of the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, we will use the Columbus story as a place to begin to explore in depth the complexity of intercultural encounter.

At every stage of this project--research, analysis, and presentation--you are encouraged to work with other people rather than in isolation.

### I. The Research

The sources of information for this project will be within public schools as well as in readings and watching of videos. Throughout this project, you are expected to keep a journal, in which you are to record, separately, two different things, in whatever fashion makes it easy for you to do both:

a) information and analysis, as described in 1-9 below
b) your personal reactions to what you are learning

1) In the schools

Begin to notice activities, conversation, materials dealing with Columbus in any way. In what language is the encounter being described?

What choices are being made here, and why, and with what effect? What does the teacher assume s/he is teaching? What are the children actually learning? How can you tell?

2) In the schools and libraries

Read and compile personal annotated bibliographies (very brief reader responses, including dates and authors) of all the children's books you can find that have anything to do with the Columbus story and/or Native American people.

Read with this in mind: What is the emphasis? How are the events and the people represented? What is left out? What's the message? What would a reader feel or think at the end of it?

If you can, sign out the books for one week and bring them to our class to exhibit and comment. Then return them!

3) Wherever you are reading

Try to arrange to sit down with one or two (or more) of any children you can find, and read these books with them. Try not to intervene with any judgments or even questions: just listen to how they listen or "read," and hear what they're saying or asking in reaction to the book. As inobtrusively as you can, record all of the children's responses--on tape, or in quick rough verbatimm notes on the spot, or in complete quick notes as soon as you are alone. Later, examine the transcripts to see if you can notice any patterns in the children's responses.

4) Everywhere

a) Notice all materials available to children: re-runs of movies; TV shows; specials from the quinticentennial, including announcements of community events, etc. Record as much as you can of the information offered, paying close attention to whose voice is represented and whose is left out, and what feelings are generated.

Find all the children's books you can that deal with Native American Indian people. Do the same thing as in a), noticing particularly: 1) the illustrations, 2) the kinds of things the people are doing, and 3) the adjectives and adverbs used to describe Indian people.

5) Jigsaw reading (some only for 355 classes)

a) of the report of the London-based Minority Rights Group report # 31, The Original Americans: US Indians. Each group will receive a section of the report, to become experts on and share with the rest of the class.

b) of Chapter One of Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States.

6) Comparative study of the material from the Minority Rights Group report with the material presented in children's social studies text books. Who's telling the truth? How do you know?

7) What's available for in-depth study of the people who lived and flourished on the American continents before the Europeans sailed over here? How to locate resources, and how to use them?

8) Other activities: viewing of Geronimo, of documentary on the Hollywood representation of Indian people, and perhaps of PBS's The Spirit of Crazy Horse. Other? Field trip to the Institute for American Indian Studies at Washington, CT?

9) Whatever role-plays come out of this work.

II. The Analysis

Reflecting on all that you have gathered, try to see the Columbus story and its aftermath from the perspective of the people who were here when Columbus arrived. Conclude to what extent the materials represent that perspective.

III. The Presentation, due the first class in November, can take any form that feels right to you. Include but do not limit it to the annotated bibliography from I,2 above.

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